

28/08/2017

## **20<sup>th</sup> Maccabiah 2017 Report Back – Alain Nathan, Maccabi SA Sports Director**

I have been gathering my thoughts and feelings about the Maccabiah and have now finally put them down on paper, below. Please read through this carefully and take the time to digest its contents.

Firstly, I'd like to thank The Maccabi SA Executive for the amazing opportunity to coordinate and organise a delegation of 300 people to the third largest sports event in the world as well as placing your trust and confidence in me to execute this project successfully. It's certainly a hugely valuable feather to have in my cap and been the most challenging period in my professional career. I'd also like to note my thanks for all The Games Committee's hard work and late hours during the build-up and at the games. I would not have been able to do a lot of what we achieved without that vital input and assistance. I have given the below report on a chronological timeline basis. This makes the most sense in my mind.

I do believe that the games were widely successful and that we did a great job in ensuring the smooth running of the games and troubleshooting of problems on the ground. There are some key issues that I would like to address and have done so below.

Thirdly, please do not regard the below as any sort of negative criticism other than constructive and in the best interests of Maccabi SA and future Maccabiot.

**24 Months before** – We started advertising the games at the right time I think but the trials were a bit scattered in terms of timing. Some happened 18 months or more before the games, others were left a bit late in my view. The trials were generally very fair and non-biased with only 1 or 2 small complaints coming out of all the trials. I do think that we did not engage with the schools properly to ensure a coordinated affair with regards to the trials and the games. I must say that some school sports directors were fantastic while others went out of their way to obstruct us and constantly changed their tune on a lot of matters. I think that by this stage we should have already started recruiting volunteers and getting games committee into place and assign responsibilities. In general I think we need a much more coordinated advertising campaign. We should have already had some fundraising efforts underway by then. Extra staff members are needed by this stage to start picking up the slack with regard to the games and handling the influx of admin which is huge. What I found is, the more organised we are, the more admin we have but the better the experience and safeguarding is for the participants.

**18 Months before** – The first of the trials took place and were very successful. There was a visceral and negative reaction to the pricing at the time (R95 000) this stigma of the price plagued us all the way up until the end of the games. Even when we made massive reductions to the cost and gave many subsidies, the feeling out there was that Maccabi was beyond reach for most. We need to

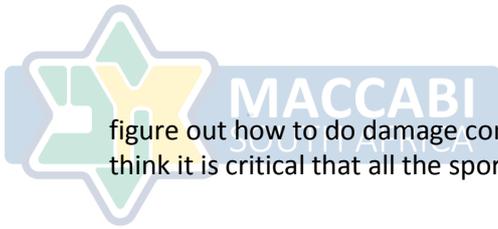


figure out how to do damage control and keep those who are good athletes in the mix. At this stage I think it is critical that all the sports Convenors, managers and coaches are selected up to strict

Maccabi SA criteria and are onboard with our narrative and policies. We had Maccabi WP appointing Convenors down there etc which was OK in the end but ALL Convenors going forward will need to be vetted by Maccabi SA in future. The convenor / manager and coach must have a signed agreement with Maccabi SA about the process over the next 18 months and what is expected of them. I also believe that they need to have a meeting where the Maccabi movement and the games are explained to them and a pack is given to them. 18 months before I need two full time staff and games committee needs to be appointed and frequent meetings must start happening.

**12 months before** – A lot of trials were still happening at this stage/ I think that this should be the cut-off for most team sports to have their final trials etc. and consolidate teams. A lot was going on at this stage and it at this critical stage where the games committee division of labour and assignment of duties needs to kick in and begin to be actioned. We had far too long a period where no one was sure what they were doing and what their precise role was. In terms of the financial aspect of this we need to review the system, the recon process was clumsy and sometimes took a while. I would recommend a part time book keeper coming into the Maccabi office 3 times a week to make sure invoicing, statements and recons are all constantly up to date. There was a lot of frustration from parents and participants in terms of their account and getting an up to date balance. I was far too involved in the finance department and it took huge amounts of time that could have been more usefully applied to more relevant areas that needed my attention. By this stage we should be in final negotiation with Kit suppliers and airlines.

We have to have lined up most of our medical team by this stage too. Primary registration should be done about 12 – 10 months before. We should use this registration to invoice all the participants. This registration will also include a team agreement stating the terms and conditions of their ongoing inclusion in the team. This would be much more efficient than having separate medical and registration forms. We could have ejected undesirables during this period if the team agreement was already in place.

**6 months before** – This is a critical stage and where the pressure of the games takes over and everyone is rather stressed out and frantic. This is obviously the nature of the games and comes with the territory. At this stage we should have myself, two staff and a third coming in for this period. The Maccabiah is a huge project and as I was handling so many aspects of it (all aspects actually), things slipped through the cracks and caused added stress to the situation E.g Delivery date of kit, badges and pins. It was also at this stage where weak convenors or managers started to crumble. I was left to convene junior netball all the way from trials, up to the games as well as co-convene junior rugby with Cliff. It was really difficult as these two teams demanded a lot of attention and extra work. We also need to be happy at this stage to remove a manager or coach we do not see fit to go to the games. We should reserve our rights from an early stage to exclude any coach, manager or participant that is not in harmony with our efforts or seeks to bring our name into disrepute. We had one case where the coach and manager didn't understand Jewish youth very well and they did not fit in very well and caused us a great amount of unneeded stress.

Also at this stage, all teams kit designs must be send to Maccabi for approval, this happened for about 70% of the teams. Again I was under too much pressure to chase those that did not. The delegation full sizing kit needs to start being send out to final sizes can be taken 5 – months before. About 3 months before a concerted and coordinated publicity and marketing plan must be executed. We did get a lot of coverage and buzz around the games organically but we were too busy to actually do any marketing until Leigh Nathan took over a week before. It is important at this stage to



check up on all the teams to ensure all is going smoothly, I did not have time for this and only dealt with various crises as they unfolded.

One important key aspect here is that by this stage we must not, under any circumstance negotiate with teams who don't want to pay the full amount without just cause. 2 sports here were huge problem areas when it came to this. We need to adopt a fall in line or fall off policy here. We let those teams emotionally blackmail and bully us into hugely subsidizing them and they were in turn some of the worst behaved individuals at the games. There is no reason for us to suffer such vilification and turmoil only to have it backfire on us. I advocate excluding those kinds of teams for 2021.

**4 weeks before** – By now we should only be putting on the final touches for the games. I feel that we took on too much finalizing last minute teams. We should have just refused and dealt with the political fallout thereafter. It's also a massive drain on resources to take these kinds of teams. The participants need to start receiving their kits at this stage. We need to receive the kit 6 weeks before in order to pack and distribute. We had kit issues as the delivery date from the supplier's side was incorrect. An issue I too overlooked what with the pressure of everything else going on. Our kit packing team and distribution worked very well what with a few errors here and there.

**At the games** – Leigh and I went as the advanced guard and we did a superb job. Unfortunately I had to leave the remaining kit distribution to Desmond and Brenderly Hyman with the kit but he did an excellent job under the circumstances, it was a small relief to actually be on the ground in Israel. The checking of accommodation, transport, sports, tags, etc., was a huge challenge and it was compounded by MWU holding our tags to ransom due to not yet fully paid account. It brought lots of unneeded stress and anxiety to me to have to constantly negotiate with MMU and accounts back home and act as the go between when we had other far more pressing issues to deal with. The staff of the registration office were frustrated on my behalf and very sympathetic. This unpaid balance hindered our organising process and distribution of tags. The advanced guard party needs at least one if not two more people (total 3 – 4). There is a lot to handle on the ground. Leigh worked on the social media and news up until 1:30 am each day and was brilliant in relaying all news and stories throughout the Maccabiah.

We needed to strengthen our management structure on the ground and our chain of command. We were at a disadvantage by not being in the same hotel. It would have made all of our lives a lot simpler and easier if we were all at Kfar Maccabiah, had a morning and evening meeting so we could ID problems, crises reaction and the plan for each day. We were a bit uncoordinated in this area. It made communication and dealing with some issues rather clumsy and lines got crossed. Our junior managers needed more support from us I think. We may even need to look at 3 managers next games. The juniors are a huge and draining area as they need constant supervision and guidance and safeguarding. Gaby and Yaron almost never got break or a full nights' sleep but were immensely successful and made excellent Junior Managers.

A particular issue that I wanted to bring up is discipline and the discipline process We needed to have a clearer outline of what is a punishable offence and exactly what the process would be. We were not consistent enough and this made us seem either too stringent or too lax.

Overall though I do think though that we performed incredibly well as a delegation and won a huge amount of medals, the fact that they were mostly gold is brilliant and the reverse of 2013 where most medals were bronze. We had one of the best Medical teams at the games and we were active



and alive on social and web media. The games were also incredibly well run from the Israel side of things and most issues were around tours, transport and of course officiating. There were also nearly no complaints about accommodation and food which is great. We had a happy delegation barring 1 disgruntled team and a few members here and there because of all of our hard work and ongoing efforts.

Through this entire experience I have built a wealth of knowledge about the games and have a much better understanding of what is required in each area of preparation execution and review of the entire games process. We can take away far more positive points from these games than negative and help to make sure our Maccabiah and Maccabi image is more and more successful and positive

Alain Nathan